

TESTIMONY SUBMITTED TO OSHA ON

HAZARD COMMUNICATION

by Forrest Buckley, Fire Fighter

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My name is Forrest Buckley. I am a Fire Fighter for the Cincinnati Fire Division and president of International Association of Fire Fighters Local #48. I would like to enter into the record the reasons why I believe that fire fighters in Cincinnati and all over the United States are in an excellent position to act as enforcement agents for hazard communication. In this testimony, I will use the City of Cincinnati as a case in point, but I would like to state that the examples used here would apply in general to other urban/industrial settings.

I would first like to illustrate my point by comparing the Cincinnati fire fighters to OSHA as enforcement agents for hazard recognition and then conclude by describing ways in which fire fighters can complement the efforts of OSHA in enforcement of chemical labeling standards, particularly local and state standards.

Fire fighters are better suited than OSHA to enforce hazard recognition standards by virtue of the vastly greater numbers and the cost-effectiveness of doing so. In Cincinnati, over 800 fire fighters make regular inspections of businesses in their own districts. Compared to this, OSHA, at its peak capacity, was never able to inspect more than 2% of the nation's workplaces annually. In Cincinnati, there are a total of 20 OSHA inspectors to handle 20 counties! The most telling comparison is the fact that the Cincinnati Fire Division has almost as many inspectors for one city as OSHA has for the entire nation!

Several advantages result from this, the primary one being the capability of more frequent inspections and more immediate response to complaints. In Cincinnati, for example, all business establishments are inspected at least once a year by fire inspectors. The most hazardous ones are inspected every two to four months and all other hazardous operations every six months. Fire fighters will have no trouble

adding to their normal fire inspections a check to see that containers are labeled, that data sheets are available and current, that appropriate safety and clean-up equipment is available - all provisions of Cincinnati's newly-passed Right-to-Know ordinance.

Because there are so many more inspectors available and because they already inspect businesses in Cincinnati, inspections for chemical labeling by fire fighters are more cost effective than if OSHA had to make regular inspections to do so since OSHA does not have the manpower to make regular, much less, frequent, inspections. In addition, covering a relatively small, ^{area} like a fire district of a city, makes each inspection less expensive than if the territory to be covered were several counties.

The second reason fire fighters are better suited to enforce chemical labeling standards is that they would tend to be more familiar with each establishment. Not only have fire inspectors been inspecting businesses for many years, but they have done so more frequently than OSHA and they have inspected all the businesses in their respective districts. Because the inspections are localized by districts, the same inspector returns each year to the same business. With this type of familiarity, the bad actors are more quickly identified and their inspections are increased. When they do improve, the fire inspector learns of it within a short period of time.

Thirdly, fire inspectors have a much greater degree of acceptance by the business community than do OSHA inspectors. Fire fighters have less association with 'government' and 'bureaucracy' and 'regulation' than probably any other inspectors entering the workplace. When an inspector who is perceived to be relatively friendly and, in addition, potentially useful enters the workplace, the inspections would tend to be easier, quicker, and above all, objections to the issue at hand - chemical labeling - would be

minimized.

Finally, fire fighters have a greater and more direct self-interest in making sure that toxic and hazardous substances are labeled because that directly affects their safety in fighting a fire or handling a chemical emergency. When we know what it is, we can take care of it more quickly and more effectively, and that saves lives of fire fighters. This self-interest is now nationally recognized, as is shown by the unanimous passage of a resolution at the 1982 IAFF convention to urge passage of effective local labeling legislation.

Just as there are certain characteristics of our jobs, training and experience, such as those mentioned above, that make us better able to conduct these inspections, there are also certain characteristics of the jobs and training of OSHA inspectors which give them the edge in other areas. While I would not argue that fire fighters are absolutely better able to enforce labeling legislation, I would say that fire fighters provide a significant and necessary complement to OSHA inspectors to get the job done. This is true even if OSHA were at peak capacity with triple the number of inspectors.

Let me describe for you the training that each fire fighter receives in hazard identification. Fire fighters receive two kinds of training in toxic materials - in Fire College where each takes a course on the Identification of Hazards, and In-Service Training on hazards. In addition, the Hazardous Materials Manual, with information on the toxic effects of chemicals, is required to accompany every fire run. In addition, about 250 fire fighters, or 1/3 of the force, have additional training in Fire Science, a college course which increasingly emphasizes chemicals and chemical dangers. We also have specialized inspectors and one of the specialties is procedures for hazard identification at industrial sites.

Chemical hazards and the recognition of the need for the right to know the substances encountered on the job are increasingly seen as crucial for fire fighters to know, both to protect themselves and to do the job. Fire fighters all over the country are increasingly interested and involved in campaigns for their right to know. As mentioned above the International Assn. of Fire Fighters recently adopted a resolution that supported the passage of local labeling laws.

As a fire fighters, I look forward to the day when we can share and exchange with OSHA the expertise and experience we have separately gained. I look forward to a mutually beneficial working relationship and shared responsibilities in our joint endeavor to protect the health and safety of the community we serve. I think this relationship is possible and desirable. You need us and we need you.

I appreciate the opportunity to make my views known to you.